



Seeds for Topazery Planted In My Childhood

By Jan Walden, Founder of Topazery

Some of the most treasured memories of my childhood revolve around jewelry. My father would often come home from work, his hands behind his back, hiding a small box wrapped in ribbon. The whole family would gather around and share in mom's joy and excitement over a new ring, bracelet or necklace that my father had carefully selected just for her.

These experiences as a child help to explain why jewelry has been a passion for me throughout my life. For me, jewelry is an expression of love and joy, the most personal and lasting gift possible. Every special piece of jewelry has a story attached to it that can be relived each time it's worn.

When Topazery first opened its doors in 2001, my company operated out of an antiques mall in Charlotte, N.C. Back then, my focus was on antique furnishings and accessories, with only a small selection of jewelry. In October 2002, I embarked in a completely new direction, taking my retail concept to the web and shifting my focus exclusively to vintage and antique jewelry. This move was a calculated risk because doing business entirely online was an unproven business model at the time.



During the early days, I taught myself the website programming language HTML and imposed on the good graces of some of my friends from the computer industry for advice. At the same time, I studied with the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) to earn their Accredited Jewelry Professional diploma, and I also became GIA certified in Diamond Grading, Colored Stone Grading and Pearl Grading.



When I look back over the years at my varied work and life experiences, I can see now how everything was leading me to Topazery – my father's indulging my mother in jewelry, a degree in English with additional coursework in computer programming, work experience in the computer industry and serving in the family business for several years. It became clear to me that one of the greatest joys of my life has always been the jewelry that I purchase for myself and for my friends. I am fundamentally entrepreneurial by nature, just like my dad was, and I wanted a career that was something I truly love and that never feels like work.

With a starting budget of less than \$1,000, Topazery.com debuted with a mere five antique and vintage rings for sale. Despite its Spartan ambience, however, my website's collection of sought-after vintage and antique jewelry offerings grew steadily and quickly attracted an audience. In fact, the first person to purchase a piece was an acclaimed NBC news correspondent.

From there, business took off, prompting me to pack up and relocate Topazery Jewelry's headquarters from Charlotte to Atlanta in 2005 so that I could be closer to experts in the industry.



This wouldn't be the last time that I would take my focus in a new direction. In 2007, I began concentrating on my own line: The Topazery Collection. That same year, a Victorian style sapphire and diamond ring from Topazery was featured prominently in NBC's hit drama TV series, Crossing Jordan.

I was extremely fortunate early in my work with Topazery to find a master jeweler in Atlanta who is invaluable in helping me evaluate and restore the vintage and antique pieces I find. I continue to work with him whenever we have pieces that may need a bit of gentle restoration. My team today also includes a Certified Gemologist Appraiser, who appraises each piece, professional photographers who assure the most detailed images possible, a webmaster to keep our website fresh and communications professionals who use words to complement beautiful imagery.

One of the most exciting aspects of my work is searching everywhere for just the right rings, bracelets, lockets and other pieces of vintage and antique jewelry that I will purchase and add to my collection. I am constantly browsing antique shows, auctions, and estate sales and networking with individuals in the United States and Europe. From the very first, I found that I have a discerning eye for pieces that are truly unique in some way, and I find the stories surrounding each piece, either real or imagined, are so enriching for me and my customers.

My customers are as diverse as the vintage and antique pieces of jewelry on my website. I work with many couples who are getting married and have decided they want unique rings rather than the typical jewelry store solitaire diamond and plain gold band. The number of women who visit my site has grown over the years, and customers often purchase a right-hand ring or a jewelry piece to remember or celebrate a personal or business milestone.



I have sold jewelry to customers living in almost every state in the U.S. as well as internationally. My prices range from \$100 to more than \$18,000, but the majority sell for between \$500 and \$2,000. My focus is on old-cut diamonds, although I also feature aquamarines, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and other gemstones. I personally select each piece, and I only purchase things that I would like to own myself.

The most wonderful thing about Topazery is when my customers share stories about when they got engaged or celebrated a special event using a piece of jewelry I sold them. Jewelry is all about treasured memories for a lifetime. It was fond memories from my childhood that started me on a path to Topazery, and it's my hope that I can help others create lasting memories that will sustain warm places in their hearts.